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CIA Retains Thick Cloak Despite Move in Congress

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WASHINGTON — The latest Congressional attempt to bring the controversial Central Intelligence Agency to heel is also destined for failure, authoritative sources have disclosed.

The House Rules Committee is currently considering a resolution creating a Joint Committee on Intelligence which would have watchdog jurisdiction over the CIA and several other government intelligence units.

Most of the 19 members of the House who have introduced identical resolutions have testified before the committee. Further hearings, during which opponents of the idea will be heard, have not yet been scheduled.

The best word is that they will never be. Even if they are, the whole thing will be an empty exercise, for the prediction is that the watchdog resolution is headed for the Rules Committee's already crowded graveyard of touchy legislation.

Many Upset

A good many members of Congress are upset over the CIA, some for legitimate reasons, some for self-seeking motives. They so far have been rebutted as well as stymied by the handful of lawmakers who have no quarrel with the supersecret agency.

As usual, there are elements of ax-grinding, politics and congressional pride crisscrossing the whole issue.

Proponents of tighter congressional control over the CIA through a joint watchdog committee argue that the agency is not sufficiently answerable to Congress and is free to "get away" with too many dangerous and questionable practices under its thick cloak.

They point out specific instances of CIA mistakes, ranging from the much-discussed

Bay of Pigs fiasco to activity in South Viet Nam which critics charge was often at cross-purposes with other U. S. agencies and with general policy in the area.

They say the CIA too often winds up making policy and moving events instead of merely gathering intelligence from outside the mainstream as it is reputedly intended to do. And in conclusion, watchdog proponents say the whole CIA operation is undemocratic and alien to the American way.

What isn't said but which colors much of these arguments is that there are special committees in both houses of Congress which do have direct legislative and financial control over the CIA.

In both the House and Senate, ranking members of the Armed Services and Appropriations

committees constitute special CIA committees which approve and guide the agency's operations and financing.

Funds 'Hidden'

An annual appropriation for the CIA is approved by these special committees and then "hidden" under another guise in money bills that reach the floor of both houses. It thus meets the requirements of legislative procedure but most lawmakers cannot single it out for comment or reaction.

Much of the complaining by CIA opponents stems from understandable miff at not being privy to such intriguing business.

Included in the watchdog group are such members of Congress as Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) and Rep. Jim Wright of Fort Worth.

Fulbright went so far as to vote against Senate confirmation of John McCone as President Kennedy's selection for head of the CIA two years ago, not because he had anything against McCone but because Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee didn't get a chance to question him.

Fulbright said since the CIA was making foreign policy his committee ought to have a crack at him.

on the other side of the argument are the members of the special committees that do have access to the CIA.

Their argument — which they always say is marred by their inability to violate security and go into details — is that the agency does a good job and that only its mistakes are publicized. They defend it staunchly by saying they know everything the CIA is up to and they approve.

Secrecy Needed

They also add, somewhat tellingly, that the very nature of an espionage operation precludes any publicity. They say too much is dragged into the open as it is, and so long as there is a need for an intelligence agency, there is also a compelling need for it to be secret.

In this group are lawmakers like the venerable Rep. Carl Vinson (D-Ga.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, who leads the opposition to the watchdog committee approach; Rep. George Mahon of Lubbock, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense.

Of course, these people are as jealous of their prerogatives as the watchdog proponents are perturbed about their lack of access to the inner sanctum.

Mahon's comment on the situation is "the (watchdog) bill is most inadvisable. It would put the security of the nation in jeopardy. I am strongly opposed to it."

Members of the Rules Committee, which is caught in the middle, are sort of noncommittal. Rep. James W. Trimble (D-Ark.) agrees with the anti-watchdog arguments that an intelligence agency ought to be secret. Rep. John Young of Corpus Christi says he hasn't made up his mind.

The status figures then to remain quo, but the CIA seems unequivocally destined to continue to be a Congressional storm center.